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NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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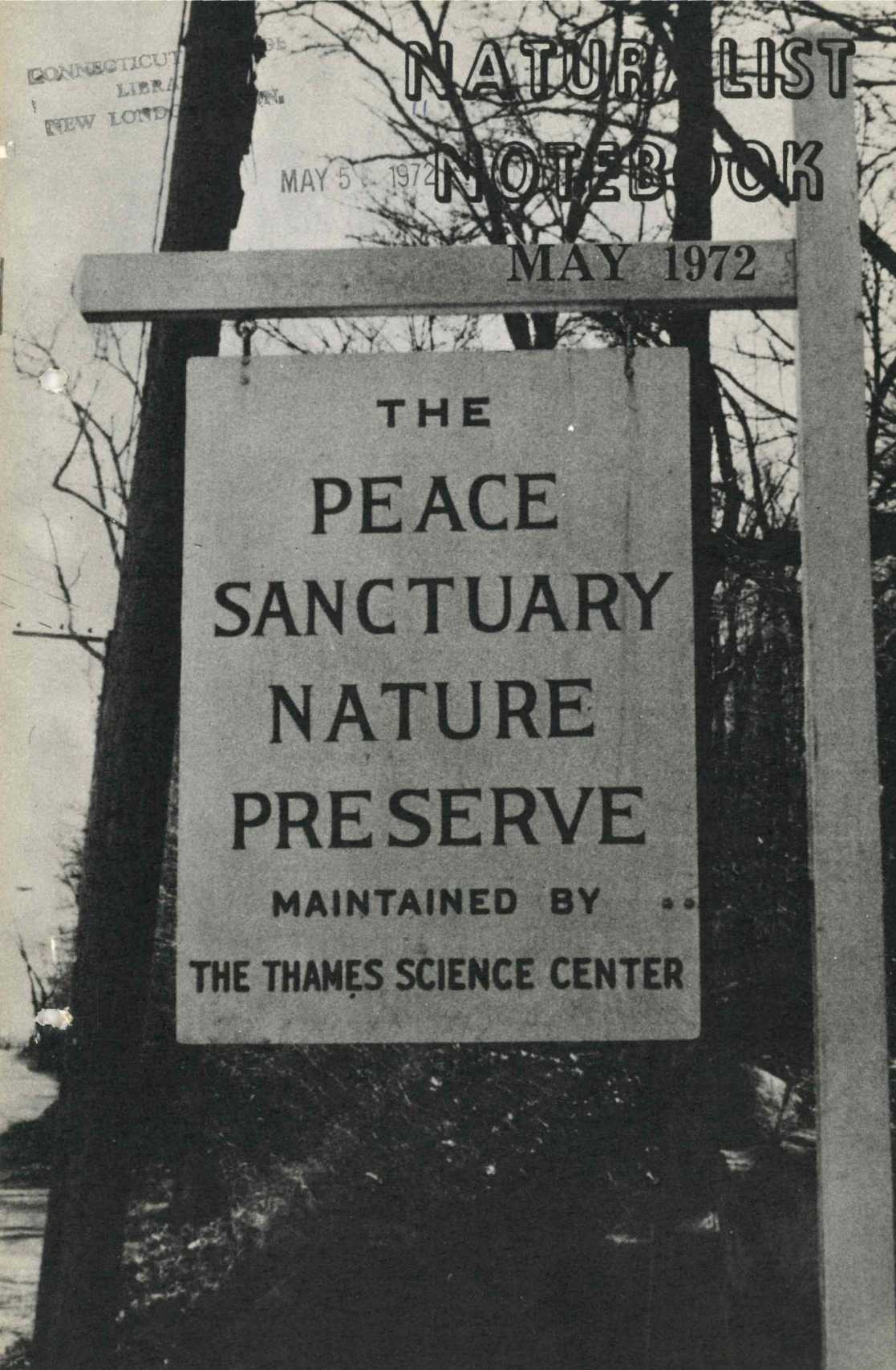

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

MAY 1972 VOLUME VIII NO. 5

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER, INC.
GALLOWS LANE
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT 06320

FRONT COVER:
PEACE SANCTUARY ENTRANCE
Photo by Frank R. Haeni

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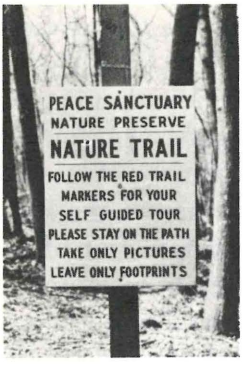


NATURE JAUNT IN MAY—THE MONTH OF FLOWERS

Text by Stephan Syz
Photos by Frank R. Haeni

The Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve is the site of bird banding stations, Bob Treat's home, and trails which weave through swamps and past ladyslipper-covered forest floors.

One hundred years ago, the Sanctuary was an open rocky pasture defined only by stone walls. On the summit of the rock ledge known as Great Hill, a few large, widely spaced oaks grew known as Fish's Grove.

On August 13, 1868, a group of Rogerene Quakers from Ledyard arrived at the Sanctuary in horse-drawn buggies for the first Peace Meeting of the Connecticut Peace Society, a subgroup of the national (and later international) Universal Peace Union, devoted to working toward world peace. For forty years outdoor Peace Meetings were held at the Sanctuary each summer. Speeches were made advocating non-violence, women's suffrage (1870) and denouncing the KKK (1871), lynching, race prejudice, war stories, toy soldiers, military academies, and military taxes. Some members also found it meaningful to write peaceful lyrics to war songs.

At the first meeting, only a few ladies spoke; but by 1871 one thousand people assembled at the Peace Meeting. Near the entrance along River Road vendors sold refreshments and hawked trinkets and souvenirs. By 1895, nine hundred teams of horses and nine thousand people arrived for the largest of all the Peace Meetings.

The following year a Peace Temple was erected in Fish's Grove on Great Hill, but because of the Spanish-American War the Society was declining and well on its way out by 1898. Statements of the sort made at the Peace Meetings were considered treasonable, making attendance much less fashionable than before.

In the early nineteen hundreds, the property of the Connecticut Peace Society was purchased by Mary Jobe Akeley, wife of Carl Akeley, the African explorer. She operated Camp Mystic for girls there for many years after completing an African expedition begun by her husband for the Museum of Natural History. While exploring the gorilla country of Mufunbiro volcanos near Lake Kivu in Africa, Carl Akeley fell ill and died, leaving the completion of the expedition and return of all materials discovered up to his wife. At her death Mary Jobe Akeley left the property of the Peace Sanctuary in trust as a place for the conservation of wild life and for the enjoyment of natural beauty.

This month I especially recommend a visit to the Peace Sanctuary on the west bank of the Mystic River. Ladyslippers, pipsissewa, rattlesnake plantain, and pyrolla will follow one another into bloom well into the summer at the very location where peace demonstrations were once held.

In May and June birds will be nesting and singing in the Sanctuary. In the cool of the morning just after sunrise and again just before sunset, the birds will be in full song. You will be able to locate them by their song and, by carefully searching them out with your field glasses, learn to associate them with their songs. Don't be too surprised if you discover a pair of doves nesting in the Peace Sanctuary!

ELL POND— A NEW NATURAL AREA PRESERVE

by Richard H. Goodwin

Ell Pond is an L-shaped body of water nestled among spectacular rocky outcrops in western Rhode Island a few miles north of I-95. The old Indian path known as the Narragansett Trail skirts its eastern end. North of it lies an extensive rhododendron and coastal white cedar swamp. The Pond is being invaded by a floating mat, made up of sphagnum moss, pitcher plants, sundews, leather leaf, Labrador tea, Virginia chain fern, and other plants typical of the bog habitat, which is rather uncommon in southern New England.

On March 24 of this year, title to a tract of land on the north side of the Pond was conveyed to The Nature Conservancy. This property, formerly owned by the late Mrs. Eva Butler and preserved by her in its natural state, was sold to the Conservancy by her son, Sewall Butler of Cromwell, Connecticut. Over 52 people and organizations contributed a total of $2,566 toward this project. Gifts ranged between $1 and $700. The Conservancy will hold the property as a nature preserve for educational and scientific purposes. Members of the Hopkinton Conservation Commission will serve on the caretaker committee.

The south side of the Pond, recently acquired by the State of Rhode Island, will also be protected from development. There are very few bodies of water in our area that are completely undeveloped. The wilderness quality of Ell Pond makes this new preserve a very choice addition to The Nature Conservancy's holdings.

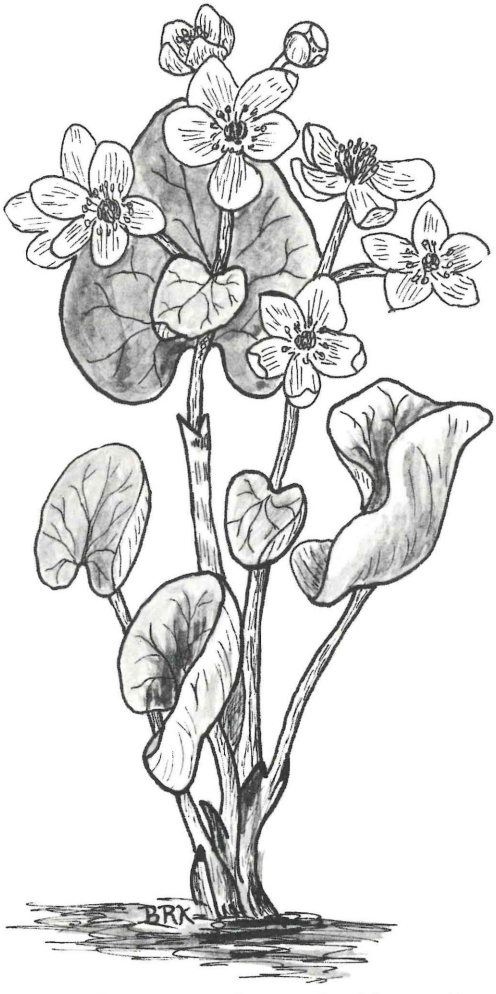
Mere Gold—The Marsh Marigold

Text and Illustration
by Barbara Kashanski

Along the banks of sluggish streams and in wet swampy areas grows one of my favorite early spring wildflowers—the marsh marigold or American cowslip (*Caltha palustris*). Actually, both of these names are incorrect. This lovely yellow-flowered plant is not even related to marigolds, and the name cowslip belongs to a European species of primrose. A better name would be marsh buttercup, for it is a member of the buttercup family *(Ranunculaceae)*, and the flower certainly resembles closely the buttercups found in our lawns and fields. The flowers are larger than our true buttercups, averaging 1"-1½" across. The yellow "petals" are really sepals, and the leaves are dark glossy green, roundish or kidney shaped. The stem is thick, hollow, and succulent.

This bright gay plant has been a favorite spring flower to many people for a long time. Back in the late 1800's and early 1900's, large bunches of cowslips were peddled about the streets in many of our eastern cities. This fact makes one stop to think how many more cowslips there must have been then, and how early our plundering and disregard of the future of certain species of plants began. It has just been in recent decades that we have had to realize that our species of plants and animals are not unlimited.

The leaves of the marsh marigold were also a favorite pot herb. Even today, foragers of wild foods (such as Euell Gibbons) consider the marsh marigold as a delicious spring green. In his book *Stalking the Healthful Herbs*, he gives several ways of preparing the leaves and also, to his credit, tells how to collect them without injuring the plant. I must admit I share the feelings of author Neltje Blanchan, who wrote a delightful wildflower book, *Nature's Garden*, in 1900. This early conservationist wrote concerning the cooking of marsh marigold leaves, "what sacrilege to reduce crisp, glossy, beautiful leaves like these to a slimy mess in a pot!" Not only were the leaves eaten but the round unopened buds were used in a white sauce as a substitute for capers.



Would anyone care for a marsh marigold condiment pickle? Mr. Gibbons can give you a recipe in his above-mentioned book. Again my preference would be to let the bud open into a bright yellow flower rather than to see it floating around in vinegar and seasonings.

Perhaps it will be adding insult to injury to tell you this plant was also used as a medicinal herb to cure warts, fits, and anemia. In addition to all this, it was supposed to have expectorant properties which made it a valuable ingredient in cough syrups. This poor beautiful once over-used and abused plant should be blooming now. If you don't know where to find any marsh marigolds, there are some at the Science Center. Come and see them. But—please—feast only with your eyes.

TO TOUCH OR NOT TO TOUCH

Text by Frank R. Haeni
Illustration by Kathie Haeni

The month of May marks the beginning of life for many birds and mammals. The birds can be seen busily catching insects and other invertebrates to feed to their hungry offspring, while the mammals are busily eating plants to gain the energy to nurse their young. Within each species of animal, the number of young varies. The number of animals that actually survive from the time of birth until the time when they leave their parents depends upon a number of variable factors. These include weather, available food supply, diseases, predators, and man.

Weather is extremely important because it also influences the remaining factors. If it is extremely wet and cold during the critical nesting period, insects which make up a large portion of the bird's diet may not be available. The eggs may "cool off" if the parent leaves the nest for any long periods of time in search of food, resulting in the death of the developing embryo, or the adults may succumb if they become wet and cold.

The predators include squirrels, skunks, raccoons, and house cats. Unfortunately, many people fail to realize that well-fed house cats will prey upon birds and small mammals. The instinct to hunt and kill has not been bred out of the domestic cat. Putting a bell on the cat's collar helps to warn the birds; however, they do not always heed the warning. While it is impossible to put a cat on a leash when it's put outside, if the pet's owner would watch the activities of his animals, he might avert some of the animals being captured.

The last category (man) covers a wide variety of problems ranging from our superhighways to workmen removing dead trees, including the helpful citizen trying to do his share for nature.

Most baby animals found are not lost, to begin with. Just as we humans would not abandon our children on the streets or backyards, the birds and mammals do not abandon theirs.

When the birds are first born, the nest is large enough to accommodate them. However, the young birds soon outgrow the nest and the parents force the young onto the ground. There they are taught to search for food and find shelter. It is at this point that the various nature and science centers are swamped with calls about abandoned or injured baby birds. However, this is not true. Although the adult birds fly to safety when danger approaches, they always have the babies in mind.

If you find a bird or nest on the ground, the best thing for you and the bird is to put the nest or animal into a bush or tree. After you leave the parents will come back, or if the parents have been killed, usually the young are adopted by adult birds of the same species.

Large numbers of young are produced each year because there is a high mortality rate in wild animals. All of the animals born could not possibly survive because there would not be enough food or space to support the surplus.

The young animal becomes imprinted upon whoever feeds it. Because of this, when we raise wild animals it is difficult for them to survive once they are put back into nature, since they have lost their fear of man. In addition, the animals do not know how to find food, shelter, or how to defend themselves.

All wild animals are protected by Connecticut wildlife laws. It is unlawful to possess a wild animal without a permit from the Department of Environmental Protection. Usually these permits are only issued to game farms, humane societies, or nature centers that show that they have a special need for possessing wild animals.

The Science Center does not possess the necessary permit nor do we have the facilities or staff required to properly handle wild birds that have been abandoned. Because of this, we highly recommend that any animals that you find be put into a tree where the parents will find them.

Caution—Plant Crossing

Text and Illustration
by Kathie Haeni

Man has used plants for food ever since our ancestors began to supplement their diet with fruits, stems, leaves, and roots of trees and grasses. Plants have been used in many other ways—in making tools, in building shelters, in medicines, in paper making, in dyes, in decorations, and even in perfumes.

Today, gardens can be grown for pleasure by anyone, indoors or out, and they may contain plants that are common or not so common. While planting and cultivating a garden of any kind is a delightful experience, special kinds of gardens that contain plants grown for a specific purpose can provide a fascinating project. A garden of performing plants, of flowers that move, grow, or respond to something in unusual ways, can be a year-round pleasure.

To have a garden of performing plants, you need little more than seeds, soil, and flowerpots, a planter, or a small plot of ground. Sunlight, water, and your curiosity and care will do the rest.

Selection of plants, of course, depends to some extent on the kind of garden you want and the climate where you live. As a contrast to a well-designed and carefully organized garden, you might choose a wide corner of your yard for a "walking plant" garden, an area where these plant performers will have plenty of room. Wherever you start them, you may be sure they will move off in some other direction. These plants move, apparently, in search of less crowded soil or water or sunlight.

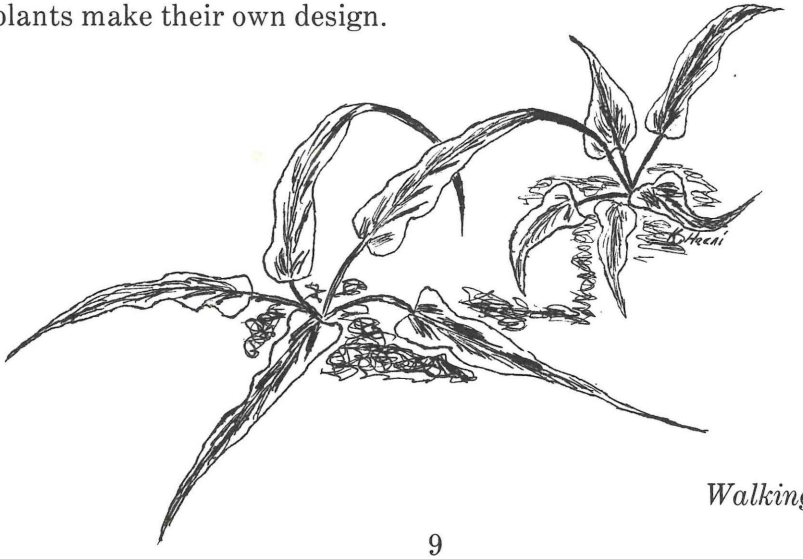
A good performer for this type of garden is the walking fern, *Camptosorus rhizophyllus.* The walking fern will send out a long narrow frond that touches the ground, takes root, and produces a new plant there. It should be started in partial shade and kept well watered.

Other plants to consider for your "walking garden" are the white clover, the wandering Jew *(Tradescantia fluminensis),* and, of course, the familiar strawberry plant. Start these plants in their own section of the garden and let them go where they will. You will eventually have an interesting pattern of crisscrossing, traveling plants.

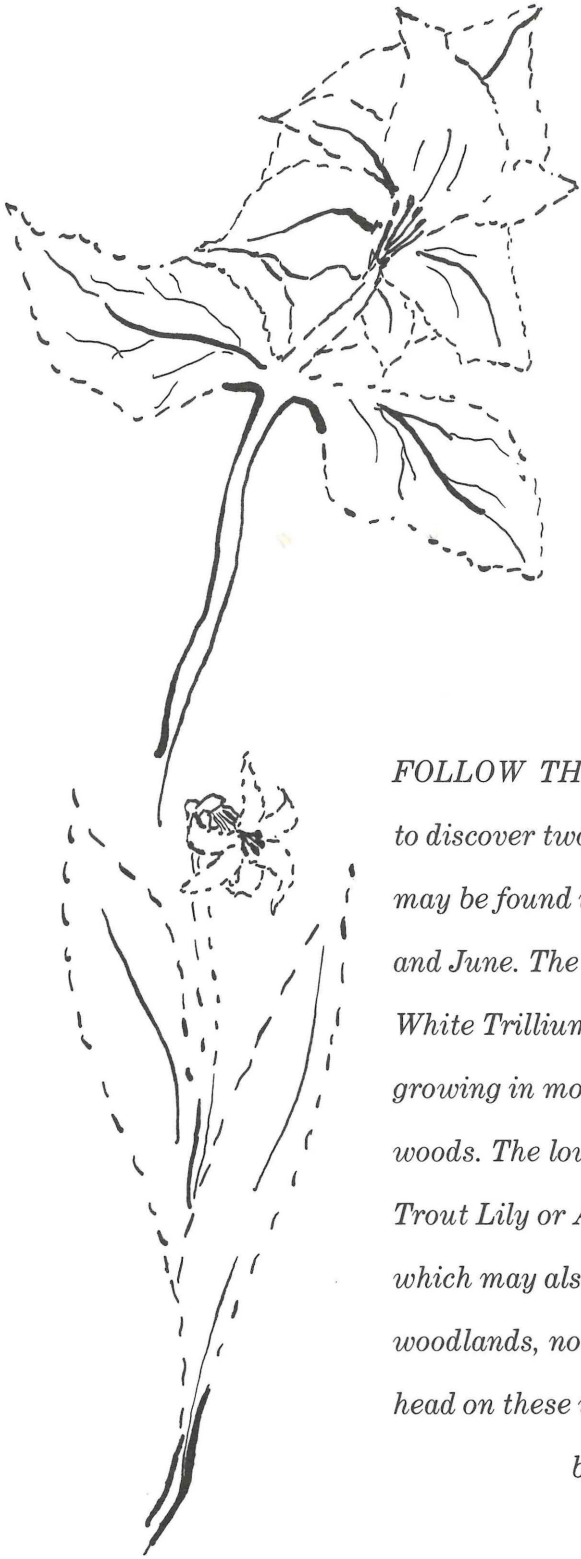
Tulips also belong in this type of garden. Have you ever noticed that you may plant tulips in a careful arrangement and find them the next year appearing in a new and different arrangement? Plant the bulbs in shade with strong sunlight nearby. You will find that they will send out shoots and start new bulbs where the sunlight is, gradually transferring food material from the old bulbs to the new ones.

As a special performer for the garden, add a plant that leaps. This is the "life plant," *Bryophyllum pinnatum.* Its leaves can live separated from the plant. Leaves detach themselves from the parent plant, fall to the ground, and start a new growth where they fall.

There is always something happening in a garden where the plants make their own design.



Walking fern



FOLLOW THE DOTTED LINES to discover two wildflowers that may be found in our area in May and June. The top flower is White Trillium, which is found growing in moist ground in the woods. The lower flower is a Trout Lily or Adder's-Tongue, which may also be found in moist woodlands, nodding its yellow head on these warm spring days.

by Shelley White

FROM THE DIRECTOR . . .

by Robert S. Treat

Oh, plastic bush and plastic tree,
What lesson can you bring to me?
I think not much; I call your bluff
And stick with green of sterner stuff.
—Carlton B. Lees, Editor, *Horticulture*

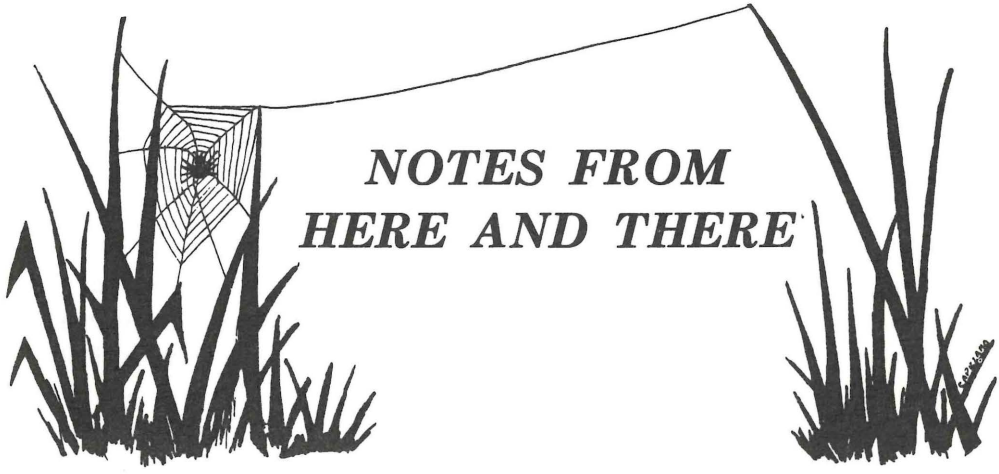
It seems too good to be true (and it always takes too long), but spring has actually arrived. Not spring according to the calendar which was here officially in March, but rather the spring we feel and know when flowers and leaves are about to burst from tight buds and the grass has a tinge of green. For most people, winter has the feel of death, stillness, and inactivity while spring is a time for rebirth, renewal, and hope.

What message of hope awaits us this spring? What is there that we can look to for guidance and inspiration, with the belief that the world is really not that bad after all? With what hope and faith can we chart our course for yet another year, believing that there is purpose in it all and, most important, some value in what we do? Each spring it becomes increasingly difficult to locate that feeling or designate the purpose we all seek. A few springs ago it was the student strikes across the country; Vietnam is still with us, and the environmental crisis is brought to our very doorstep with the recent oil spill off Bartlett Reef. Yet there is good news, news that is fundamentally significant and should not be glossed over because it did not make front page headlines.

In our incredible haste to achieve "progress," this has meant relying on industrial technology to pave the countryside with plazas, malls, superhighways, ticky-tacky developments where ponds and meadows once were, and to keep at it until one wonders if there will be no end. It has reached the point where thoughtful people are beginning to question if there are only a few "nature nuts" who like the woods, green things, birds, and a feeling of wilderness. We also wonder if there is such adaptability in man that, if he grows up in cement cities, what he will truly crave will be more cement cities, in the process moving "progress" that much further towards a greenless and treeless environment. A confirmation of this fear was demonstrated rather dramatically not too long ago.

Mr. Gor[illegible] Yamada, Supervising Engineer for the Los Angeles County Roa[illegible] Department, announced that his department would be "plant[illegible]ng" $74,000 worth of plastic dwarf palm, laurel bush, Chinese evergreen, flowering magnolia, peperomia, and Bar Harbor juniper. Can you imagine a highway strip of 1.7 miles along Jefferson Boulevard near Marina del Rey planted with plastic greens? Americans seem to be the only ones who actually prefer the substitute for the real thing, whether it be artificial flavors or fake blondes to real brunettes. Are we doomed?

But wait, there really is some good news! It seems that the people of Los Angeles reacted against this proposal, and in one section where plastic trees were already installed, they have to be removed. Does this mean then that man must have some direct contact with reality and that basic reality is, after all, the grass, trees, flowers, meadows, fields, streams, and woods which we have taken for granted and assumed would always be there? If the people of Los Angeles—a city of cement—can put its foot down on plastic trees along the highway, perhaps there is something in *all* of us which may force a stop to the old definition of progress and point the way to a new one. That is the hope.



NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE

FRIENDS OF THE CENTER: Mrs. Ellery Allyn and Mrs. Leon J. Bascom have renewed their Friend memberships.

GOVERNOR THOMAS J. MESKILL announced in his budget message that he is setting aside $92 million for conserving and developing Connecticut's natural resources. His proposal calls for an increase of 20 per cent for the Department of Environmental Protection and the earmarking of $80 million for clean water, clean air, and open space.

A GOOD LIFE FOR MORE PEOPLE is the theme for the 1971 Department of Agriculture Yearbook, just off the press. Sections deal with Space for Living, Services for Living, Production Resources for Living, and Issues for the Future. Order your copy from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. $3.50.

INLAND WETLANDS: GOING ... GOING ... The Connecticut Conservation Association has just published its *Reporter*, devoting the entire issue to the problem of saving our *inland* wetlands. The Center has sent you a copy as a public service. We urge you to read it completely and ACT on its message.

MARGARET WARING BUCK has just given the Center her latest book, *How They Grow*, published by Abingdon Press. It is a delightful book and on sale at the Museum Shop.

THE JUNIOR CURATORS are expanding in membership and activities. They are now twelve in number, with one to join shortly. Their curatorial support has been invaluable in maintaining the live animal exhibits, assisting in workshops, donating a year's subscription of *The Curator*, and preparing and issuing their own quarterly publication, *The Curator's Courier*. Recently they enjoyed a trip to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Members are Katie Beal, George Dallas, Donna Davis (Secretary), Karen Hirschberg, Cathy Kashanski (President), Susan Kashanski (Treasurer), Jeff Land, Kit Oldham, Bill Ryan, James Smith, Robert Wyand, and Wanda Wyand.

OIL SPILL—1972: When the oil tanker *F.L. Hayes* hit Bartlett Reef on March 21, 1972, it created a leakage of approximately 80,000 gallons of No. 2 oil. Although a light oil and difficult to distinguish on the water, it is nevertheless a peril to marine life and waterfowl. During the emergency, the Thames Science Center was designated as a repository for oil-soaked birds by the U.S. Bureau of Sport, Fisheries and Wildlife. Birds brought to the Center were cared for until eventually taken to Fairfield, where a cleaning station was set up. The Center's role in the crisis was mentioned on local radio stations and in the newspapers, and the picture below showing one of the birds brought to the Center was on the front page of *The Day*.

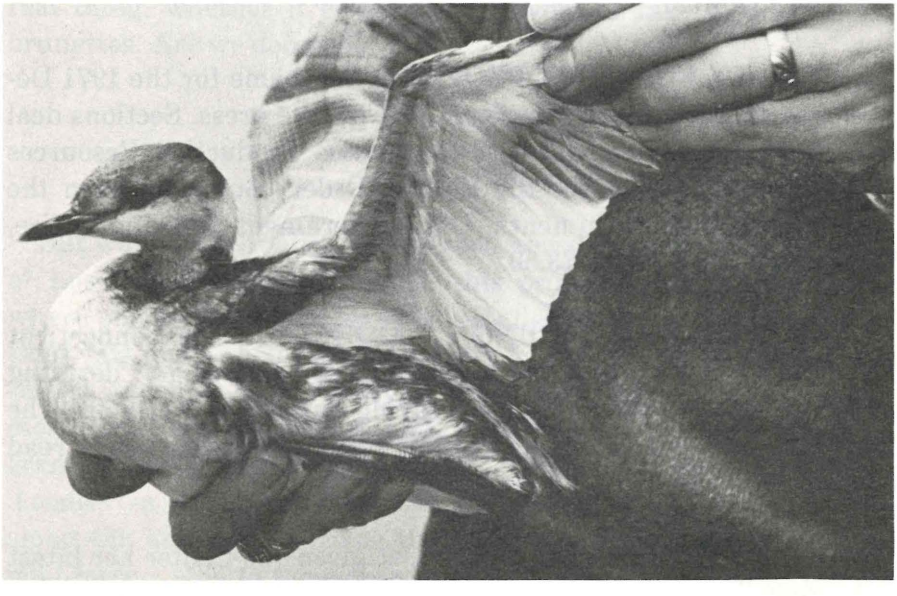


Photo by Jack Urwiller of *The Day*

MARCH FIELD NOTES

CONTRIBUTORS: Please send or call in your field notes to Frank Haeni at the Center by the last day of the month. We are planning to publish reports by the calendar month rather than the staggered dates formerly followed. This should be more convenient for future reference.

New London, Waterford: Between 6-12 GADWALL were at Harkness the entire month, and 3 WOODCOCK were observed nearby in Waterford also all month. Twenty KILLDEER were seen March 6 and 7, and a GREAT HORNED OWL on March 19. At Harkness there were 28 BRANT on March 31.

Niantic, the Lymes, Saybrook: Fifty GREEN-WINGED TEAL were in Old Lyme on March 7. A pair of RING-NECKED DUCKS were seen in Niantic March 11, where an OSPREY was spotted March 23. TREE SWALLOWS were observed at Rocky Neck on March 23 (5-6) and at Gordon's Pond on March 26 (100+). In Old Lyme 5 CANVASBACK were seen March 24 and 25+ PINTAILS on March 26. Several hundred BONAPARTE's GULLS were seen on that same date in Saybrook. On March 29 a pair of WOOD DUCK were in Old Lyme and 2 CHIPPING SPARROWS were noted. At Rocky Neck, 9 GREAT BLUE HERON and a COMMON EGRET were listed March 30, along with three OSPREYS.

Mystic, Stonington: A rare GRASSHOPPER SPARROW was at the fish market in Stonington on March 6 and through the month. FOX SPARROWS were heard singing on March 13. On March 15 a HONEYBEE carrying pollen in leg basket was observed. A MERLIN was sighted near Route 201 in Stonington on the 16th. The OSPREY returned to Barn Island on March 20 this year. SPICEBUSH was seen blooming at Pequot-Sepos on March 24. On the 27th a REDHEAD DUCK was in Lantern Hill Pond and 5 RUDDY DUCKS in the Mystic River, where a SHOVELLER and 5 COOT were seen March 29. Fishermen were actively catching FLATFISH under the I-95 bridge from March 29 on. CARDINALS, SONG SPARROWS, and TREE SPARROWS were noted actively singing and setting up territories.

Groton, Ledyard, Preston: On the night of March 2, SPRING PEEPERS were found along with GREY TREE FROGS and WOOD FROGS. A BARRED OWL also was seen. Three GLOSSY IBIS were seen in the small ponds east of Bushy Point on March 5, where 8 WOODCOCK were also seen performing. The ALBINO EVENING GROSBEAK reported last month was again seen in Preston March 12 and subsequently. HOODED MERGANSERS were seen courting on that same day. Two RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS and three RED-TAILED HAWKS were observed over Amos Lake during courtship flight, with the two males of the latter species actively competing for the single female. SPOTTED SALAMANDERS were plentiful around March 17; one was observed measuring 8¼". REDPOLLS were last observed March 23.

Contributors: G. Bissell, M. Capizzano, H. Gilman, F. & K. Haeni, H. Kelsey, P. Spitzer.

Hepatica

SPECIAL NOTE

Watch the monthly newsletter for scheduled Saturday banding programs if you would like a chance to see the warblers close up.

The following birds were banded during the month of March at the Thames Science Center:

- Red-winged Blackbird (3)
- Cardinal (1)
- Black-capped Chickadee (2)
- Mourning Dove (4)
- Grackle (3)
- Slate-colored Junco (10)
- White-breasted Nuthatch (2)
- Redpoll (2)
- Pine Siskin (3)
- Fox Sparrow (10)
- Song Sparrow (2)
- Tree Sparrow (2)

At the Peace Sanctuary, the following were banded:

- House Finch (2)
- Slate-colored Junco (2)
- Pine Siskin (98)

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

NATURE FESTIVAL

Saturday, June 10
Sunday, June 11

Field Trips, Demonstrations & Indoor Programs

Tidal Marsh
Pond Life
Rocks and Minerals
Astronomy
Edible Plants
Mist Nets & Bird Banding
Bonsai
Reptiles & Amphibians
Conservation & Ecology
Bird Identification
Trees & Shrubs
Wildflowers & Ground Covers

Marine Science Boat Trips on Thames River

Scuba Diving Demonstration
Plankton Sampling
Bottom Dredging

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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Margo Hirschberg—Librarian
Barbara Kashanski—Field Trips
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JOSEPHINE S. MERRILL
Editor

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